

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
Marine Corps University
Character Development
User's Guide to Marine Corps Values

RIGHT -vs- WRONG

--Ultimately, every Marine is drawn to a situation in which he is compelled to apply the fundamentals of what he believes to be just and right.

--Unknown Marine

1. Introduction. The above abstract depicts a situation that every Marine faces in the course of their career. That is, eventually every Marine will be witness to some action that will require him or her to apply the factors of integrity, ethics, morals, and culture to a situation that, by virtue of being a Marine, he or she is responsible. Marine leadership, is by no means foreign to the welfare of human life, that is our fellow Marines. We as Marines must decide what is black and white, and what composes the deterrents of each. We must genuinely know what is right and what is wrong.

2. Overview. The purpose of this period of instruction is to make Marines aware of the moral and ethical principles that compose the values which distinguish right from wrong.

3. References

- a. FMFM 1-0, Leading Marines
- b. USNA Guide for Naval Leaders
- c. Dictionary of Social Sciences
- d. FM 22-100, Military Leadership
- e. Appendix A: Definitions

4. Discussion Leader Notes. Initiate group discussions in the case of each of the of the practical exercises.

5. Discussion

a. Marines should attempt to set the example in every aspect of themselves, whether it be as leaders or as followers. If a Marine continuously sets the example, he/she will be successful in all aspects of life. If a Marine religiously pursues attainment of all the leadership traits, as described in FM22-100, he/she will unequivocally set a good example.

b. Sometimes doing what is right is not the easiest path to follow. Certain situations arise in which the best course of action cannot be clearly decided as being the right or wrong

thing to do. A good example is the famous dilemma of stealing a loaf of bread to feed a hungry family. Your response to these dilemmas will depend upon your up-bringing and exposure to morals and ethics. What may be right and justified in one culture or sub-culture, may be inappropriate or illegal in another. It is in this fine distinction that many Marines find themselves confused.

c. Consider the young Marine who was brought up in the inner city. After accession into the Marine Corps, this individual gets caught smoking marijuana and is repeatedly disciplined for fighting. While drugs and violence against peers may have been the norm in the inner city, it was emphasized in training that it is illegal, and has no place in the Marine Corps. In such cases, Marines need to know that common cultural norms of society as a whole and the Marine Corps regulations override any pre-existing sub-cultural norms. This is not to say that all crime in the Marine Corps is attributable to a lack of moral and ethical training, but simply that with specific training, the Marine will know that a particular action is right or wrong.

d. The basic Marine Corps definition of integrity, "Marines do not lie cheat or steal, nor tolerate those who do," must be the foundation of every Marine's professional and personal ethics. When officers and NCO's deviate from the standards of conduct, it makes correcting other Marines nearly impossible. In a letter to Professor Karel Montor, Admiral Arleigh Burke summed up the importance of integrity:

"Integrity"

"First you find yourself overlooking small infractions that you would have corrected on the spot in the past. Soon you are a participant in these infractions. "After all," you say, "Everybody's doing it." All too soon you find yourself trapped: You no longer can stand on a favorite principle because you have strayed from it. Finding no way out, you begin to rationalize, and then you are hooked. The important fact is, the men who travel the path outlined above have misused the very basic quality and characteristic expected of a professional military man, or any other professional man for that matter: They have compromised their integrity."

e. Every Marine starts out his/her career with unblemished integrity, and it is up to the individual to either maintain or tarnish that integrity. Once one's integrity has been compromised, it is very difficult to regain it in the eyes of your peers. Doing the right thing will not always make you the most popular Marine in the squad bay, but it will give you a clean conscience and demand the respect of others. It is obvious that down the road this is far more important than

winning any popularity contest. In short, integrity and "doing the right thing" go hand in hand.

f. Perhaps one of the most difficult tests of integrity is peer pressure. Everyone has been in a situation where "everyone" is doing something wrong, and the pressure to join in is great. One may think, "If I don't join in, then I will lose respect among my peers, not gain it." This is untrue in the professional environment. We as Marines, have the moral obligation to do what is right. This means not surrendering to peer pressure when it may involve illegal or immoral decisions.

g. It is easy to sit back and say that you would do the right thing by keeping a friend from driving drunk, or turning a peer over to the authorities for committing a violent crime. But what about doing the right thing when no one is in immediate or even remote jeopardy of being hurt? Surely doing the wrong thing, and not turning someone in for cheating on a test is better than ostracizing yourself from your group of friends, isn't it? Not in the Corps! Even fulfilling a promise is no justification to moral wrong-doing.

Again, we are Marines and are subject to a stronger set of morals and ethics than most civilian organizations. When a Marine deviates from this moral path it is the responsibility of his/her fellow Marines to help him/her back onto the path, or risk themselves becoming no different from the cheater. Furthermore, whether we realize it or not, most rules have a purpose. "The law is the last result of human wisdom acting upon human experience." (Samuel Johnson, Miscellanies, i, 223).

Cheating or bending the rules may not have immediate ramifications to the individual, but down the road it could create dire consequences. What about the platoon commander who cheats on a call for fire package, only to find himself in a combat situation in desperate need of supporting arms. How about the young Lance Corporal who lies constantly and gets away with it, and then finds that a lie about a seemingly unimportant situation gets someone killed or injured. The more we do the wrong thing, the harder it becomes to recognize right from wrong. Conversely, once we bill ourselves as moral and ethical, doing the right thing becomes second nature. This is the point where you will have earned your self-respect and the undying respect of your peers.

h. Now let's take a look at some case studies. Read the situations that follow and discuss them with your platoon or peers. Talk about the moral issue involved, the ramifications thereof, and what is being done right. Discuss how you would act

in the situation? Do you have what it takes to do the right thing, or would you bow out and do the wrong thing?

6. Practical Exercises

a. Exercise #1

(1) Special situation. You are a young, hard charging PFC just out of boot camp. Upon checking into your first duty station, Camp Pendleton, you immediately make friends among your peers. One of your new friends, PFC Cana, has asked you to join him and several other Marines in a party trip to Tiajuana, Mexico. You eagerly accept. On the way, you hear PFC Cana repeatedly asking those around you if they had the "stuff." Thinking they are talking about booze, you pay no attention. After reaching Tiajuana and partying at the bars for several hours, PFC Cana and his friends demand that you accompany them back to the hotel, so you can be initiated into the group. You follow since you really like to hang out with PFC Cana and his friends, and you would like to be invited back. Upon entering the room, PFC Cana breaks out a bag of marijuana and begins to roll a marijuana cigarette. Your "initiation", explains PFC Cana, is to "party all night and to feel no pain."

You have never touched drugs, and the mere sight of them outrages you. But this is a tricky situation. On the one hand, you want to become part of the group, and it's not like anyone will ever find out about this. Also, you figure that no one is in danger of getting hurt since you are all staying at the hotel. On the other hand, if you decline, chances are that the rest of the group will call you weak and not have anything to do with you. There could also be threats or violence against yourself, out of their fear about being reported. If you smoke the drugs this time, will it become a weekly occurrence? What if this is just the beginning, and the group is also into hard drugs, or even major crime? Do you think that they will take it personally if you "just say no?" Do you think you have a responsibility as a Marine, to report these individuals?

(2) First Requirement. Discuss what you would do.

(3) Proposed Solution. Refuse the marijuana and inform PFC Cana that while you are not afraid of the marijuana, it is an illegal drug, and that he is currently breaking the law, and disobeying a Marine Corps order. Advise PFC Cana of the risk he is taking with respect to his career. Further advise him that while you enjoy hanging out with him and his friends, you would prefer the company Marines who live by integrity and honesty.

b. Exercise #2.

(1) Special Situation. A new lieutenant was accused of having numerous sexual liaisons with enlisted personnel. These accusations came to light through several anonymous letters to presented to the commanding officer. These complaints came as no surprise, since the lieutenant was seen on several occasions drinking and dancing with many enlisted Marines during the past few months.

You are the investigating officer. A staff sergeant tells you in private of having had sexual relations with the lieutenant, as had many others that were identified in the letters of complaint.

As your investigation ends and your interviews finish, you prepare your draft report. Upon showing the report to your senior, he proceeds to make changes to the report, which essentially water it down. Your senior then informs you to formalize your report and submit it.

As you review the report, you find that some statements have been changed and other statements of a sensitive nature have disappeared altogether. Furthermore, many of the witnesses you spoke with, have since been told to keep quiet on the issue, or face the consequences.

Your senior apparently wants this incident covered up, both to save embarrassment to the unit, and not have the careers of many fine NCOs threatened by the acts of one lieutenant.

As the OIC of the investigation, you feel you can understand the concerns of your CO. Furthermore you know that failure to comply with your CO's wishes could result in a poor FITREP, in effect destroying your career. However, you also know that you are entrusted with special trust and confidence by your commission, and you know what is right.

(2) First Requirement. Discuss what you would do in the situation.

(3) Proposed Solution. Express your concerns to the CO about submitting a false report. Respectfully inform your CO that you have no intention of downplaying this incident, and that threatening witnesses is a direct violation of their rights. Further inform your CO that while the careers of many fine NCOs are in jeopardy, they nevertheless violated a major Marine Corps order prohibiting fraternization, and to let them get away with it would be setting a poor example for others to follow.

c. Exercise #3.

(1) Special Situation. Smith and Jones are good friends, and both are coming up for promotion. In order to increase their cutting scores, and enhance their knowledge, both decide to sign up for the same MCI.

As far as careers go, both are outstanding Marines. While they know that MCI's are meant to be taken individually, they both joke about how good it is that they are both enrolled for the same course, since they can now "check each others answers."

When the MCI's arrive, Jones uses the majority of his free time to quickly finish the MCI, while Smith takes on a "put it off until tomorrow" attitude.

Upon completion of the MCI, Jones comments to Smith that he better get "moving" on the MCI. At this point, Smith confides in Jones that he has no time to finish the course, and has trouble "understanding the material." He asks Jones for help.

Being a good friend, Jones agrees to guide Smith in some broad concepts. However, as the two continue on, Jones realizes that Smith is asking him for specific answers. Jones begins to feel awkward in the situation, not wanting to come across as not supporting his friend.

Jones knows that Smith has crossed the line. Furthermore, since both Marines are equal, Jones doesn't think it's fair that Smith is willing to cheat in order to obtain the same cutting score as himself. What would happen if Jones gave him the answers, only to find out that he did not pick up the promotion, while Smith did? Aside from this, being an outstanding Marine, Jones does not want to jeopardize his integrity. Jones finds himself at an impasse on how to approach the subject with his long-time friend.

(2) Requirement. Discuss what you think Jones should do in this situation.

(3) Proposed Solution. Jones should be honest with his friend by making it clear that he is there to help Smith, not cheat for him. Smith may not be aware of how his actions are being interpreted. In any case, if the two are true friends then Jones should have no problem confronting the problem in a open and honest manner, without jeopardizing the friendship.

d. Exercise #4.

(1) Special Situation. LCpl White is with his platoon on their way back from a CAX. Along the way, the bus stops to get gas and to give the Marines a chance to get some chow and to stretch their legs. Using the free time, LCpl White enters into the mini-mall/food court with a small group of Marines and his squad leader, LCpl David.

After chow the Marines still have fifteen minutes before the bus leaves, so they decide to check out the music store for some CD's. Upon looking through the titles, LCpl David grows excited after finding a CD he thought was no longer on the market. Upon realizing that neither he, nor any of the Marines around him have the money for the CD, LCpl David decides he must have it right then. As the other Marines head back to the bus, LCpl White is on his way out of the store, when he notices LCpl David tearing the magnetic sticker off the CD and making his way to an unoccupied part of the store.

As the bus leaves, LCpl David takes the CD out of his sea bag and puts it into his portable CD player, and begins to listen to it. LCpl White approaches LCpl David and asks him if he stole the CD, and is told to "mind your own business, or life in the squad will become very rough on you."

Knowing that LCpl David stole the CD, LCpl White returns to his seat to consider his options.

(2) Requirement. Discuss what LCpl White should do.

(3) Proposed Solution. LCpl White should inform LCpl David that he is sure he stole the CD, and that he is setting a poor example for his squad. LCpl David should further be informed that using his position of leadership to make threats is in the utmost of unprofessionalism. LCpl White should give LCpl David the opportunity to return the CD and turn himself in. If LCpl David refuses these terms, then LCpl White should report the incident through the chain of command.

e. Exercise #5.

(1) Special Situation. As the XO of a Marine fighter/attack squadron on deployment in the Mediterranean, you have been told by the CO to conduct a readiness inspection and have a report ready within fifteen hours. Shortly after this order, you learn that your squadron is to fly a combat air patrol for a TRAP (Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel) mission to rescue a downed American Airmen. Upon completing your report, you realize that you are short on spare parts and not capable of flying the mission within set safety parameters.

Almost immediately after you turn in your report, you get a secure call from the CO instructing you to change your report to reflect a combat ready squadron. The CO further instructs you that your squadron has the only acceptable readiness level for the operation and the downed pilot cannot afford to wait for spare parts. Every delay is an additional threat upon his life.

While you realize that the hostile country in which the pilot is located has a small air force at best, and that rescuing a comrade in arms comes in the highest calling, you also realize that should any unexpected enemy air power show up, that this operation has "disaster" written all over it. Furthermore, intelligence has indicated that if the pilot is captured and somehow allowed to live, finding his location will be next to impossible for months to come.

(2) Requirement. Discuss what you would do, taking into account values, ethics, and right versus wrong.

(3) Proposed Solution. Inform your CO that you will not falsify a report, but rather you will submit the report through the chain of command. Also inform your CO that mission requirements are set for a reason, and disregarding them is not a wise thing to do. The commander of the operation will be in a better position to order the operation if he is in possession of the most accurate reports available. If he feels that the mission is worth the risk he will still give the go-ahead.

To this point we have discussed doing the right thing with regards to our peers and fellow Marines. However, the United States Marine Corps enjoys the greatest reputation of any other organization on earth. This reputation has not come from hollow promises, but from battlefield success. Such reputations are not set in stone and must be constantly maintained if our Corps is to continue to excel in the next century. As Marines, we are not only held to a higher standard by our Corps, but by the American people who support us. When Americans open a newspaper and read about Marines drunk and disorderly, cheating on tests, and committing felonies, America's opinion of the Marine Corps suffers. As for the Marines who commit these crimes, they gravely tarnish a reputation earned by the blood of thousands who have gone before.

7. Summary. It has been said that our country lacks the moral fiber it possessed twenty years ago, and unless we get it back, our country will cease to be great in the future. The same is true of the Marine Corps. The task of retaining, believing in, and applying our core values is as important as ever. The Marine Corps has the opportunity to lead the way into the next century in regaining our traditional American values. This belief refers

not only to the law, but to our morals and ethics as well. For most of us doing the right thing has nothing to do with the law; it is just about doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. Walking the lines at "zero dark thirty," when it is below freezing is the right thing to do, just as not taking responsibility for your actions is wrong. Neither of the two may be in any law, but most of us agree with them. This is where the ethics and morality behind doing "right" and doing "wrong" come into play. When we, as a Corps, can implement these concepts, and you as a individual Marine, can implement them in every situation that arises, then we will truly be leading the way and setting the example for America. It is the right thing to do.

8. Appendices

Appendix A: Definitions

RIGHT -vs- WRONG

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS**

Right. An ethical or moral quality that constitutes the ideal of moral propriety and involves various attributes, such as adherence to duty; obedience to lawful authority, whether divine or human; and freedom from guilt.

Wrong. Something that is immoral or unethical such as, Principles, practices, or conduct contrary to justice, goodness, or equity, or to laws accepted as having divine or human sanction.

Culture. The body of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits constituting a distinct complex tradition of a racial, religious, or social group.

Sub-culture. An ethnic, regional, economic, or social group, exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society.

Morality. Goodness and uprightness of behavior; conduct conforming to the customs or accepted standards of a particular culture or group.

Morals. Conforming to, or proceeding from a standard of what is good and right.

Ethics. The principles of conduct governing an individual or a profession; the discipline dealing with what is good and bad, or right and wrong, or with moral duty and obligation.

**From Webster's New World Dictionary